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ABSTRACT

Research supports the contention that teacher education programs are not teaching character education methods as seriously as they do other subjects. This paper examines the state of character education methods instruction in U.S. teacher education and provides a rationale for the consideration of intentional moral or character education instruction in teacher education. A 1995 study investigated the status of character education methods instruction in U.S. preservice teacher education programs. Heads of education programs at denominational, private, and state colleges and universities in four regions of the country completed surveys to ascertain the presence and conditions of character education methods instruction to preservice teachers. The findings were based upon the responses of 95 institutions, comprising 7 percent of all colleges and universities in the United States with enrollments exceeding 200. Results indicated that respondents tended to support the notion of character education methods instruction, though few reported significant direct instruction to meet that end. The programs appeared satisfied with minimal provisions for preparing teachers adequately. Most of those who indicated they taught character education methods spent less than 1 week in instruction. (SM)

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Who's Teaching Teachers About Character Education Instruction?

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Abstract

The author examines the state of character education methods instruction in teacher education programs across the country. A rationale is provided for the consideration of intentional moral or character education instruction in teacher preparation programs. (Published in Current Issues in Middle Level Education, fall 1997.)

Who's Teaching Teachers About Character Education Instruction?

The cover of a recent New York Times Magazine asked, "Who'll teach kids right from wrong?" (Rosenblatt, 1995). In the lead article, Teaching Johnny to be Good, readers sit in on a character education lesson with a group of 11-year-olds in a middle school in central New York State. This class represents a growing trend in public schools. Character education in public schools is being discussed on local, state, and national levels. In the last few years Mississippi, New Hampshire, and New Jersey have joined the list of states with state-wide programs of character education. Chicago, Seattle, and St. Louis public school districts are among those who have adopted city-wide moral education programs.

American schools have a rich moral education tradition. The "Old Deluder Act" of 1647 was among the first United States laws through which compulsory public schools were established. The chief intent of this law was to build and preserve society's moral fiber through education. Early public education was predominately moral in character. Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, noted framers of the United States Constitution, proposed legislation advocating moral and ethical education in public schools (Button & Provenzo, 1983).

In 1787 the Northwest Ordinance included provisions for funding public schools stating, "...religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged (Amundson, 1991, p. 18)." Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries public school curricula reflected religious and moral values. The overtly moralistic McGuffey Readers, first published in 1836, became one of the nation's most popular reading texts (Ornstein & Levine, 1993). Character education continues to play a key role in our nation's public schools.

An American Association of School Administrators (AASA) survey found 74% of responding school leaders believed students "urgently" needed to develop a stronger sense of values and ethics (Amundson, 1991). Increased crime, uninhibited media, and apparent nonchalance toward violence have led many to conclude America's youth are growing up in a moral vacuum. A survey of school-children in 1990 revealed the majority of students often relied upon self-interest and trial-and-error in making moral decisions (Coles & Genevie, 1990). Society has apparently reached a state of panic over the perceived erosion of traditional values in society. Many concur America has become a morally "rudderless" society (Rosenblatt, 1995).

As the nation goes, so go public schools. National concerns have invariably found their way into public education. American society traditionally assumes national ailments are due to deficiencies in public education. Society and politicians likewise assumes that the cure for the nation's problems are to be found in curriculum changes and reform in public schools. National issues continue to be reflected in public education and ultimately dictate the curriculum for schools of education. The influences of the Sputnik, war in Vietnam, global economics, and nostalgia for the "3 R's" of simpler days are evident in public schools.

In the midst of perceived moral crisis considerable hope for social reform is being placed in America's public school teachers. Increasing numbers of citizens are calling upon public educators to assist in the moral education and character development of American youth. A number of moral education and character building programs have emerged for school and community use. The authors of Teaching Values and Ethics identified seventeen private and four state moral education programs (Amundson, 1991). Many contemporary books and journals pose moral questions that must eventually be addressed in America's teacher education programs. If

tomorrow's teachers are to be responsible and effective conduits of moral education, teacher education programs must take up the challenge of moral education methods instruction.

Imagine a middle level teacher education program in which pre-service teachers are expected to learn how to teach without the benefit of instruction. What is the likelihood of a pre-service teacher learning how to effectively teach math or science to seventh graders without intentional, direct instruction? As irrational as this may seem, this is the way most teacher education programs in the United States handle character education.

More than 10,000 public schools in the United States have moral or character education programs, yet few middle school teacher preparation programs squarely address teaching character education (Amundson, 1991). Though middle school teachers may expect to teach some sort of character education curriculum in their first year of teaching, few have been specifically trained to do so. Recent research conducted by the author at Baylor University indicates that the majority of United States pre-service teacher education programs are failing to purposefully teach teachers about character education.

Research evidence supports the contention that teacher education programs are not teaching character education methods in the same manner as language, math, science, or social studies methods courses. In other areas of the curriculum intentional instruction has demanded intentional preparation. Character education has yet to be taken seriously as a part of middle school curriculum.

Many educators falter at the notion of specific methods or strategies for moral or character education. An "infusion" approach was alluded to frequently in research survey comments. One respondent stated, "Our program and its goals inherently embrace moral

education and decision-making strategies (good, right, just, merciful methods of teaching). It is understood as a part of our framework and cannot be separated out.... It is who we are ." Another stated, "Morals should be modeled and demonstrated, but not taught." While these may be admirable statements about morality, they fail to address methodology. The infusion approach assumes pre-service teachers will learn character education teaching methods solely by observation of lessons in other disciplines (Wakefield, 1996).

Is mere "infusion" adequate? An argument for a character education curriculum that is dispersed throughout the curriculum and integrated into other subjects is valid, but does not negate the need for direct methods instruction. Supporters of whole language or an integrated math approach would never consider dropping direct method instruction and adopt an infusion approach. Faculty and mentor demonstration of proper reading and math behavior does not insure effective reading and math teaching ability in pre-service teachers.

Mid-level teacher education has yet to acknowledge character education's reentry into the United States public school curriculum. An increasing number of new middle school teachers are being held responsible for teaching moral or character education, yet the majority of pre-service teacher education programs have not taken up the task of training teachers to teach moral education. The responsibility for preparing teachers who are equipped to teach character education falls squarely upon middle school pre-service teacher training programs

Research Methodology

A survey study was conducted at Baylor University by the author in 1995 investigating the status of character education methods instruction in United States pre-service teacher education

programs. Heads of teacher education programs of United States denominational, private, and state colleges and universities in four regions were surveyed to ascertain the presence and conditions of character education methods instruction to pre-service teachers. The findings were based upon the responses of 95 institutions, comprising 7% of all colleges and universities in the United States with enrollments exceeding 200.

Findings

Heads of pre-service teacher education programs tended to support the notion of character education methods instruction, but few reported significant direct instruction to meet that end. United States pre-service teacher education programs appeared satisfied with minimal provisions for preparing teachers well-versed in character education methods.

A comprehensive, multifaceted approach to character education methods did not appear to be the norm in United States pre-service teacher education programs. Based upon responses and comments, more than half of the program heads indicated character education methods were not directly taught to any significant extent in their pre-service teacher education programs. Most of those who indicated they were teaching character education methods spent less than one week in instruction.

Survey results suggested most United States pre-service teacher training programs have overlooked character education methods instruction. The evidence indicated a near complete lack of consensus on the issue of character education methods instruction. Neglect of purposeful character education methods instruction seemed to be the only point in which all programs appeared to agree. No significant standards, norms, nor instructional commonalties were evident.

Most pre-service teacher training programs in the United States have been failing to teach character education methods to any significant degree. The average pre-service teacher has spent little or no time studying character education methods. Programs offering multiple units of study involving weeks of instruction were rare. If the survey responses fairly represented United States pre-service teacher training programs, character education methods courses are an extreme rarity. Premeditated, purposeful instruction in character education methods has been the exception rather than the rule.

A discrepancy existed between what heads of pre-service teacher education programs supported and what their programs actually provided. According to the survey results, accepting responsibility for character education methods instruction did not equate to actual instruction. Correlation coefficients between support and actual instruction were low. Support for teaching character education methods instruction was widespread, yet the actual teaching of character education methods was not.

The survey results suggested most program heads were open to a curriculum component in character education methods instruction, but most lacked a coherent plan of attack. The survey data gave the impression most program heads knew something should have been happening in this area, but they were not exactly sure what.

Among the various regions and types there were no data that suggested identifiable trends, norms, or differences. There were no specific character education methods instruction plans that appeared in more than one program. There was no evidence of inter-program collaboration or cooperation having taken place.

Recommendations

Methods for consistently and effectively teaching moral behavior, values, virtue, and character should be addressed in the curriculum of pre-service teacher education programs. The American public is demanding that morality and character education be included in the public school curriculum; therefore, higher education must take note and respond. If a content area is to be purposefully learned and explored, it must also be purposefully taught. Character education methods will be effectively taught when program heads view character education in the same manner as they view learning about reading, writing, music, or other subject areas. This is not happening in most pre-service teacher education programs.

Failure to teach character education methods may be indicative of a breach in professional ethics. If program heads strongly suspect their students may need character education methods, yet fail to provide them, they may be failing in their duty as pre-service educators. Consistent and effective learning in any discipline comes as a result of methodological teaching.

The call for conscientious instruction is the most compelling point in this study. However, based upon the findings, several additional recommendations are in order. First, heads of pre-service teacher education programs should lead their schools in addressing character education curriculum and instruction issues. Such leadership should involve more than a passing discussion in a contemporary issues in a curriculum course. Pre-service teacher education programs should be expanded to include *intentional* character education methods instruction. Research and inclusion of character education instruction in the mainstream curriculum should be encouraged. Rapid change in relation to the problems exposed in this study depend largely upon the leadership of heads of pre-service teacher training programs.

Second, pre-service teacher education programs should give evidence of an awareness of what is happening in character education in United States schools. Developing such an awareness would include being informed and exposing students to resource materials, media, operational programs, and options in character education. New teachers should be made aware that they might be expected to implement a character education program in the classroom.

Character education methods could easily be included in the present curriculum of most pre-service teacher education programs. Though the survey indicated a lack of focused instruction in character education methods, it did point out areas where such instruction could take place. If a course is not to be offered, perhaps the best avenue of instruction would be one or more units in other methods courses.

Finally, pre-service teacher education programs have the opportunity to lead or follow society in character education instruction. Either approach offers viable options and alternatives for pre-service teacher training. Regardless of the case, character education instruction should be addressed in pre-service teacher training programs.

Teacher education curriculum addressing the content, context, and methods of character education should be designed, developed, evaluated, and implemented in pre-service teacher education programs. Many of the teacher education programs included in this study certainly have personnel with the ability to tackle this curriculum task. Current curriculum and methods approaches to character education in public schools should be catalogued and compiled. Collaboration and cooperation should be encouraged and perhaps funded by the State or higher education.

Up to this point most middle school classroom teachers have learned to teach moral or character education through curriculum vendors, trial and error, or outside sources. Very few have been directly equipped for character education instruction by their alma maters. This situation need not continue. United States middle school pre-service teacher education programs have the resources and the skills to remedy this problem.

Character Education Resources

Advisor-Mentor Program, Keith McMann, Superintendent, Cedar Bluffs Schools, Box 66, Cedar Bluffs, NE 68015.

Bill Parsons - West Point Character Education Project, Troup Public School District, 1920 Hamilton Road, LaGrange, GA 30240, (706) 812-7957.

California State Board of Education, Department of Education, P. O. Box 271, Sacramento, CA 95812-0271.

Child Development Project, 111 DeerWood Place, Suite 165, San Ramon, CA 94583; phone: (415) 838-7270.

Center for Civic Education, 5146 Douglas Fir Road, Calabasas, CA 91302; phone: (818) 340-9320.

Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character, Boston University, 605 Commonwealth Ave., Room 356, Boston, MA 02215; phone: (617) 353-3262, fax: (617) 353-3924.

Character Education Curriculum, American Institute for Character Education, 342 West Woodlawn, San Antonio, TX 78212; phone: (512) 829-1727.

Community Service, Dr. Barbara Whitaker, Asst. Superintendent, Expanded Services, Atlanta Public Schools, 2960 Forrest Hill Drive S. W., Atlanta, GA 30315.

Developing Studies Center, 2000 Embarcadero, Suite 305, Oakland, CA 94606-5300; phone: (501) 533-0213, (800) 666-7270.

Educators for Social Responsibility, 23 Garden Street, Cambridge, MA 02138; phone: (800) 370-2515.

Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP), Linda McKay, The Network for Educational Development, 6800 Wydown Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63105; phone: (314) 727-3686.

Quests International, 537 Jones Road, P. O. Box 566, Granville, OH 43023; phone: (800) 446-2700.

Sharing Values Through Storytelling, Jerry Terrill, Executive Director of Student Services, Jefferson County Public Schools, 1829 Denver West Drive, Golden, CO 80401; phone: (303) 273-6614.

StarServe, 701 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 220, Santa Monica, CA 90401; phone: (213) 452-STAR.

Teaching Teachers: "A Community of Learners" Approach, Anthony Napoli, Asst. Superintendent for Supervision and Planning, Manhasset UFSD, 200 Memorial Place, Manhasset, NY 11030; phone: (516) 627-4400.

The Heartwood Institute, 425 N. Craig Street, Suite 302, Pittsburgh, PA 15213; phone: (800) 432-7810.

The "Just Community," Birch Meadow Elementary School, 27 A B Lord Drive, Reading, MA 01867.

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